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Fitness Forum

by Dick Kazmaier, Chairman
The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports

WALKING INTO THE 90'S

Walking is natural. You know how to walk. You swing your arms forward and backwards, and step along. What could be simpler? It's like breathing; you hardly have to think about it. You just do it. It just happens.

Yet there is more to walking than we might think . . . . the way your legs move with each swing of the arm. Right arm forward, right leg back; left arm forward, left leg back. Heel, toe . . . . heel, toe. Right, left . . . . right, left. With each step your arms swing naturally like pendulums of a giant clock. What does this arm swing do for you? It helps to maintain your balance. In addition, it sets the timing and the rhythm of your step. The faster your arms swing, the faster your step. With this motion, more power is added to your walking stride.

An excellent aerobic exercise, walking can help you lose weight (brisk walking burns about the same number of calories mile for mile as jogging without the high impact stress placed on the joints) and helps to strengthen your heart and tone other muscles. It can help you control stress, and help improve your mental alertness.

It is imperative that children develop good physical fitness habits at an early age. If you are a parent of young children, it is easy to teach them the joys and benefits of living actively through walking. While many thousands among our adult population are realizing the health, physical and psychological benefits of active lifestyles, the fact remains that infants and children are not as naturally physically active as is commonly assumed. Help them establish some positive lifetime habits with a walking program.

Some basic walking tips:

1. Wear comfortable shoes that firmly support your feet.
2. Wear thin, clean, dry socks.
3. Give yourself time for warming up and cooling down before starting vigorous exercise. Slow, easy walking serves as an excellent warm-up and cool-down.
4. In starting a walking program, take it easy at first. Stop at the first sign of soreness or pain.
5. Avoid walking on roads where traffic could be a hazard.
6. An easy stroll after a light meal can be beneficial.
7. For high walking performance, swing your arms forward and back at your sides and keep your body and head straight. Walk tall!
8. For weight loss, walk for time - preferably 6 to 7 days per week. Don't worry about speed. For cardiovascular conditioning, walk more briskly about 3 to 4 days per week.

Design your own personal fitness walking program for the coming year. We would do well by heeding the advice of two former United States presidents:

"Take a two-mile walk every morning before breakfast."
Harry Truman (advice on how to live to be 80)

"Of all exercises walking is best."
Thomas Jefferson (1786 Letter)

For a free brochure on walking for exercise and pleasure, write to the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, Fitness Walking, Washington, DC, 20001.

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